

## Timeline Investigation

# Report: Using Pamphlets for Propaganda, Misinformation, Intimidation, and Division

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 12 JULY 2022 (UPDATED ON: 13 JULY 2022)

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## Executive Summary

Myanmar Witness has documented and investigated trends in the dissemination of pamphlets containing misleading or unverified information, pro-regime propaganda, intimidating and religiously biased messaging, and graphic imagery. Through this investigation Myanmar Witness has found that, since April 2021, pamphlets of this kind have been disseminated in areas of previous protest such as Yangon (ရန်ကုန်), as well as the northern regions of the country, including Kachin State (ကချင်ပြည်နယ်). In November, the dissemination of pamphlets appears to have shifted, with distribution concentrated in Sagaing (စစ်ကိုင်းတို), Magway (မကွေးမြို့) and Chin (ချင်းပြည်နယ်) - areas where conflict between local defence groups and the military was reportedly increasing in frequency.

Investigators at Myanmar Witness have analysed the language used within the pamphlets, their aesthetic appearances, the use of imagery, and the methods of distribution. While Myanmar Witness cannot officially verify the source of these pamphlets, this investigation suggests that many of the pamphlets originated from the same source. Additionally, this investigation has highlighted a worrying trend that pamphlets are being used to terrorise, intimidate, suppress and divide populations.

Through this research, Myanmar Witness has identified a worrying trend: pamphlets have been disseminated with 'warnings' to the public, either threatening potential attacks, or legal action against those involved in anti-regime activities, such as the Silent Strike. At the time of reporting, Myanmar Witness is aware of one location where such a warning was reported

and which has subsequently, allegedly, been subjected to attacks. These attacks came one month after the pamphlets reportedly appeared in the village. However, Myanmar Witness cannot confirm that this attack was linked to the pamphlets disseminated.

**[Warning: Graphic]** has been inserted ahead of links to sources which show graphic and distressing images of injured or dead persons.

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## Introduction and Context

Since April 2021, a strange phenomena has been reported throughout Myanmar – one might consider printed pamphlets as a form of propaganda passé in this day and age; however, unverified claims of air dropped pamphlets have been reported throughout Myanmar. While Myanmar Witness are unable to officially confirm the rationale for the distribution of these pamphlets, this research has identified a number of common themes within the pamphlets: the spread of misinformation, the use of intimidation, and attempts to sow division within the population.

At first, the distribution of pamphlets of this kind, and in this manner, might seem obsolete when state-owned media networks, for example the Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM), are spreading pro-regime rhetoric via more modern forms of media: television, online news media, social media, and newspapers. However, when the context is considered, including the targeted locations and methods of dissemination - airdrops or hand deliveries allegedly by plain-clothed individuals - this phenomena begins to make more sense. This research suggests that the pamphlets may serve as a method to disseminate information to large areas of the population who are routinely disconnected from the internet, as well as to combat the levels of resistance and anti-regime activity in specific areas of the country.

The Myanmar military regime has intermittently shut down internet and mobile data in the country since the February 2021 Coup – especially early on in their takeover – as evidenced by [Netblocks](#) data from 2021 which shows significant communication restrictions. Throughout March 2021, the internet in Myanmar was cut-off from 0100 to 0630 local time. On 15 March 2021, cellular network connectivity was also shut off from 0000 and remained cut off for at least 100 days, until 11 May 2021, when Netblocks stopped [reporting](#) on mobile data connectivity in Myanmar. The distribution of pamphlets during times of internet blackouts could signal a desire to control the media narrative by disseminating information and propaganda to individuals, while disabling their ability to access other news sources, or fact-check information. As such pamphlets could provide an alternative to traditional methods of disseminating information and propaganda.

In some instances, these propaganda leaflets have reportedly targeted northwestern regions of Myanmar - regions where there have been notable rebellions against the regime and which are harder to access due to their rural and mountainous geography. For example, the northern Chin State (ချင်းပြည်နယ်) and the northeast Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) are both areas where long-standing ethnic armed groups have extended training, weapons and operational support to increasing numbers of PDFs. In a report by [Myanmar Now](#) internet cuts from September onwards were linked to intensified conflict in the areas of Chin, Magway Region (မကွေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) and Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး). In early October, the Security Administration Council (SAC) launched “Operation Anawrahta” (အနော်ရထာ စစ်ဆင်ရေး), a convoy-oriented operation targeting Chin State (ချင်းပြည်နယ်) and, in the Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), a separate offensive named “Operation Alaungmintayar” (အလောင်းမင်းတရား စစ်ဆင်ရေး). The focus of the offensive in Chin State (ချင်းပြည်နယ်) was to capture Camp Victoria. The Chin National Army (CNA), while small and militarily inactive in recent years, has retained a core of trained personnel and opened its Camp Victoria headquarters in Thantlang Township (ထန်တလန်မြို့) to hundreds of

People's Defence Force (PDF) fighters. The operation also aimed to gain control over two major supply routes in Chin State (ချင်းပြည်နယ်): the Kale-Falam-Hakha road, and the Kanplat-Mindat-Matupi road. A large-scale conflict is reported to have taken place throughout October and into November ([Asia Times](#), 2021) parts of which have also been documented by Myanmar Witness.



*Figure 1: Satellite imagery highlighting the geographic areas of Chin State (ချင်းပြည်နယ်), Magway Region (မကွေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) and Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), where instances of these pamphlets began appearing after November 2021.*

Locals have reported that aircrafts were used to distribute the pamphlets across the northern regions, and they speculated that their use within conflict areas was due to a fear of local PDFs and mine attacks. As well as providing access to hard to reach locations and preventing confrontation on the ground, aircrafts could help to obscure the individuals responsible for the dissemination of this information.

The rhetoric analysed within these pamphlets appears to sew and reinforce inter-group divisions, including religious divides, through the proliferation of false statistics and unverified claims about muslim citizens or local defence groups. Additionally, the type of misinformation or unverified information contained within these pamphlets appears to target those rebelling against military movements in the north. If the SAC really intends to eventually call for democratic elections in the state, these pamphlets could help to denounce the National Unity Government (NUG) and National League for Democracy (NLD), as some of these pamphlets directly reference these political parties and link them to violence and the drug trade. The language and imagery suggests that the PDF are associated with brutal acts

against civilians. This sentiment may be being used to discourage locals from supporting the PDF and represent an attempt to increase military support.

Myanmar Witness has also tracked pamphlets containing warnings or thinly-veiled threats which were disseminated to the public, specifically targeting those who might be directly involved in anti-regime activity, or indirectly involved through providing aid and shelter to anti-regime activists. This furthers the idea these pamphlets seek to stoke intergroup tensions, including between friends and family of dissidents in Myanmar. This comes at a time when reports indicate a stark increase in Burmese parents and friends disowning and kicking-out their anti-regime family members. This has included public denunciations through announcements on state-owned media channels ([South China Morning Post](#), 2022). These threats to personal security could disincentivise people from engaging in protest and other anti-regime advocacy in Myanmar.

Since the beginning of 2022, Myanmar Witness has also collected images of signs and leaflets containing overt threats of legal and military repercussions for those who engage in anti-regime activities such as: attending the nationwide Silent Strike;<sup>1</sup> housing PDF members; and, supporting political opposition movements or local defence forces. This pivot indicates a more threatening and less subversive attempt to control the narrative in Myanmar. However, Myanmar Witness has been unable to verify many of the claims involved, including the location of images of pamphlets, the way they were disseminated, or who created and/or disseminated these pamphlets.

## Methodology

Myanmar Witness follows a methodology of digital preservation and rigorous, replicable analysis. Digital evidence is collected and archived in a secure database and preserved with hashing to confirm the authenticity and prevent tampering.



Geolocation is conducted using a varied array of open source online tools such as Google Earth to match satellite imagery with visual features identified in the footage or images. A high burden of proof is required to match imagery and geolocations are required to be cross-checked and peer-reviewed before they are credited as verified and included in Myanmar Witness reporting.

Chronolocation is typically conducted by analysing UGC timestamps to determine hard end limits for the possible time frame. This can then be followed with contextual analysis, for

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<sup>1</sup> The Silent Strike is observed by pro-democracy activists in Myanmar. During the Silent Strike businesses have [shut](#) between 1000 and 1600 to signal defiance against the February 2021 military coup and generally people are not on the streets. These nationwide strikes were observed in [March 2021](#), at several points throughout the [rest of the year](#) and again on [1 February 2022](#), marking one year on from the February 2021 coup.

example comparing against known indicators such as events or clocks visible, weather, and shadows. Shadow angle is determined after geolocation and its orientation is used to determine the position of the sun and thus time. This is not always incredibly specific but chronolocation is included as specifically as possible without incorrectly attributing time in order to account for possible issues.

If dealing with unverified information, such as witness testimony or the inclusion of outside reporting, Myanmar Witness has made known that these inclusions are claims and have not been independently verified by Myanmar Witness, but their inclusion may still be relevant to include as context around the investigation. Following ethical standards, Myanmar Witness has obscured identifying information about individuals involved, censored private information and images where appropriate, removed links to private individuals and archived said information securely. Where appropriate, Myanmar Witness has also censored or discluded graphic imagery in our reporting.

This particular report contains very little geolocation and chronolocation of the exact associated media due to the nature of the images. However, through gathering instances of these pamphlets and the areas they were alleged to have been dropped, Myanmar Witness has mapped out the areas claimed to have been affected by these leaflet drops and the times in which they are claimed to have happened, to analyse the possible motives or actors involved in the distribution of these pamphlets.

## Limitations

The information obtained by Myanmar Witness comes from an area of ongoing conflict so it is assumed that there is a selection bias, due to several factors including fear of repercussions for uploading, unavailability of information from official sources and availability, or lack thereof, the internet - which has also restricted the amount of media available to be verified by Myanmar Witness. Myanmar Witness strives to eliminate as much of this bias as possible by using both focussed and broad search terms in multiple languages across open sources as well as identifying media from multiple sources, such as social media and both pro and anti-regime news media to reduce the effects of this bias and ensure as much information from a range of sources is collected.

While there were plentiful allegations of propaganda drops, the media associated cannot often be chronolocated or geolocated due to the nature of the images, or the possibility that these images represent the same leaflets due to the similar aesthetic/uniform style of recent pamphlets. Images that have been geolocated are of individuals alleged to be involved in their dissemination; however, Myanmar Witness cannot confirm that any of these individuals pictured are verifiably involved in pamphlet dissemination and, where this is the case, Myanmar Witness has highlighted these complications to make the reader aware of the issues surrounding the verification of images related to the distribution of these pamphlets.

The following report may not have captured everything in relation to claims of propaganda leaflets due to the limitations of open source collection and verification. As a result, this report may not be able to capture the full picture.

## Distribution of Propaganda Pamphlets

Images of pamphlets began to appear on social media around April 2021, following major clashes between the military and anti-regime forces throughout Myanmar - notably in March 2021. The pamphlets contain similar pro-regime content, but have aesthetic and structural differences. This investigation suggests that in the first half of 2021, the focus of these pamphlets was not in Sagaing (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), Magway (မကွေးမြို့) and Chin State (ချင်းပြည်နယ်). At this time, the focus for repressing anti-regime sentiment was elsewhere, largely in urban areas, including Yangon (ရန်ကုန်). However, we still see reports of pamphlets in Kachin State (ကချင်ပြည်နယ်). In the period of March to November 2021, Myanmar Witness has found very little reporting on these pamphlets, other than social media posts, and seemingly no claims that they had been disseminated by air. From November 2021 to January 2022, this changes. Reports of the distribution of pamphlets increased on social media, some of which were aesthetically uniform, and there were claims that these pamphlets had been disseminated by air. It is interesting to note that these pamphlets appear to target areas where the internet has been cut by the Myanmar military regime and anti-regime resistance has been taking place - either through protest or PDF activity.

Throughout March 2021, the internet in Myanmar was cut-off from 0100 to 0630 local time, reported by [Netblocks](#) (Figure 2). On 15 March 2021 cellular network connectivity was also shut off from 0000 and remained cut off for at least 100 days. At the same time that Myanmar Witness identified some of the first reports of propaganda pamphlets on social media, on 16 April 2021, [Netblocks](#) reported that the internet had been cut off in Myanmar. From 0100 the internet was restricted, marking the 62nd night in a row of military-imposed shutdowns, with network connectivity shut off for the population (Figure 3).

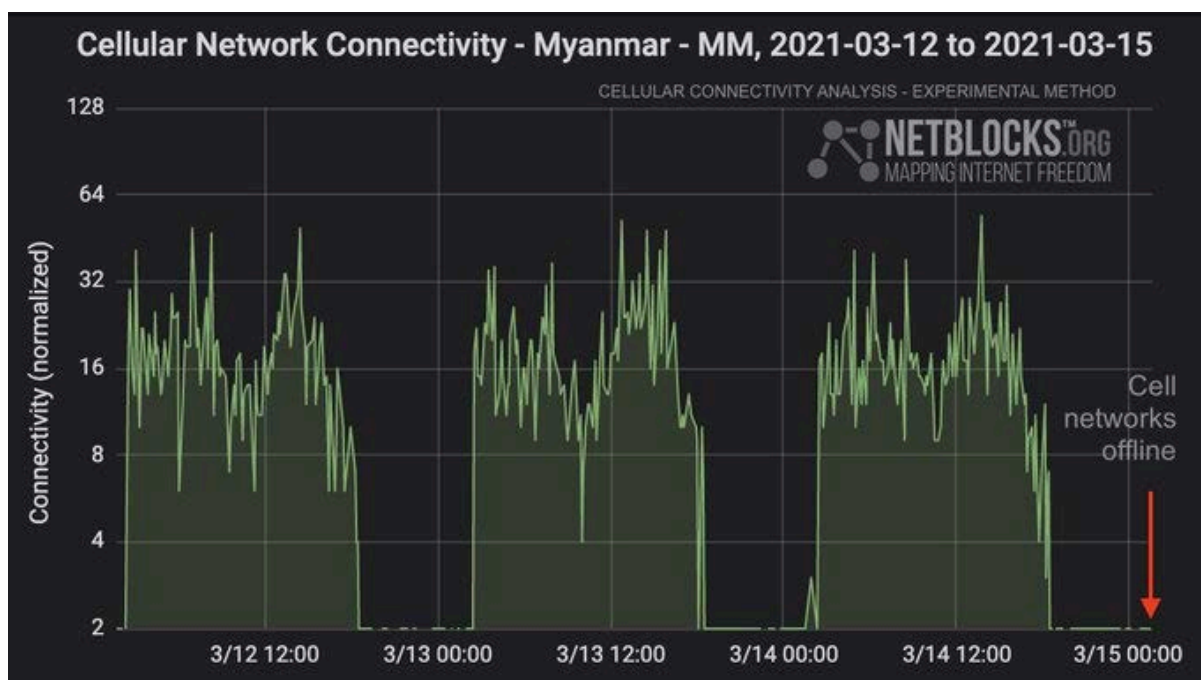


Figure 2: Network connectivity being shut off in Myanmar on the 15th of March.

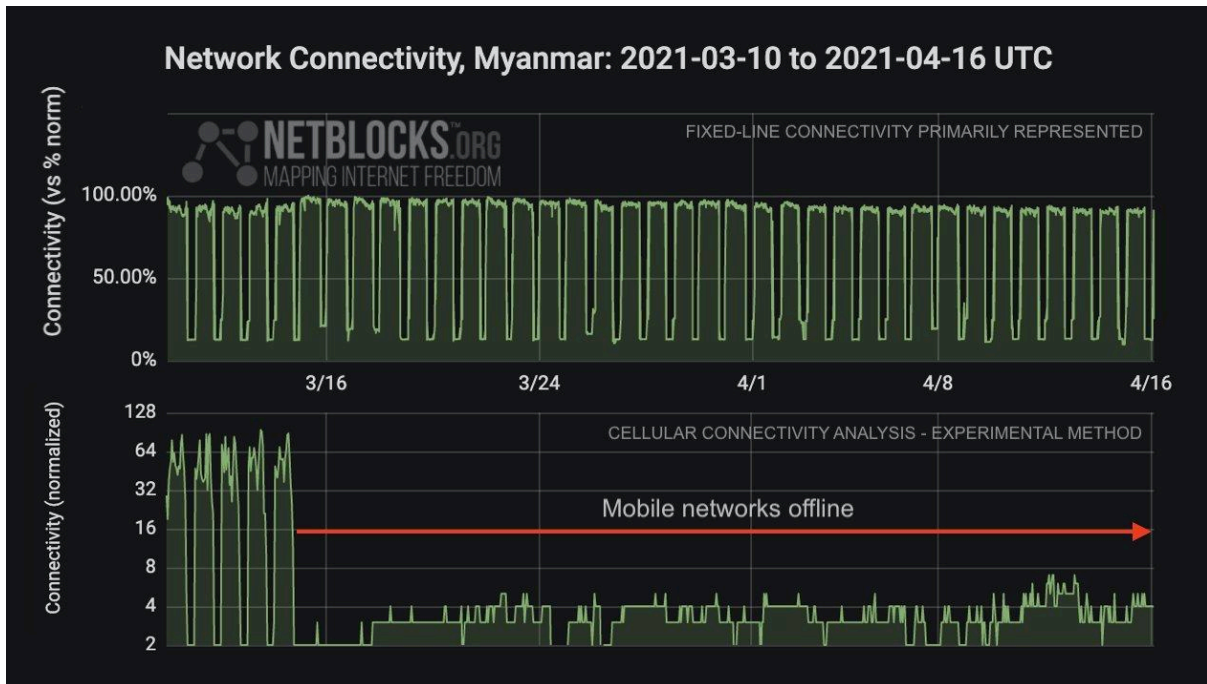


Figure 3: Cellular connectivity is shut off on 16 April 2021.

## April 2021 - June 2021

### April 2021

Some of the first reports online of the military disseminating misleading and unverified information in pamphlets was identified by Myanmar Witness in April 2021. In mid-April 2021, following the February 2021 Coup, numerous reports on social media began to appear claiming that the military were handing out - and throwing from their cars - pamphlets with pro-regime rhetoric and messages denouncing anti-regime groups. In Yangon (ရန်ကင်း), it was reported that pamphlets were handed out on 15 April 2021, calling the NLD 'vote thieves' and supporting the necessity of the military coup to establish stability in the country (Figure 4). On the same day, another pamphlet was reported on social media (Figure 5). While it was also in support of the military, it differed in that it was attributed to the Gen Z protest group. This was denied by the protest group, who pointed out small aesthetic differences between these pamphlets and their own pamphlet style. Additionally, locals reported that these pamphlets were thrown from military vehicles, but this cannot be confirmed by Myanmar Witness.

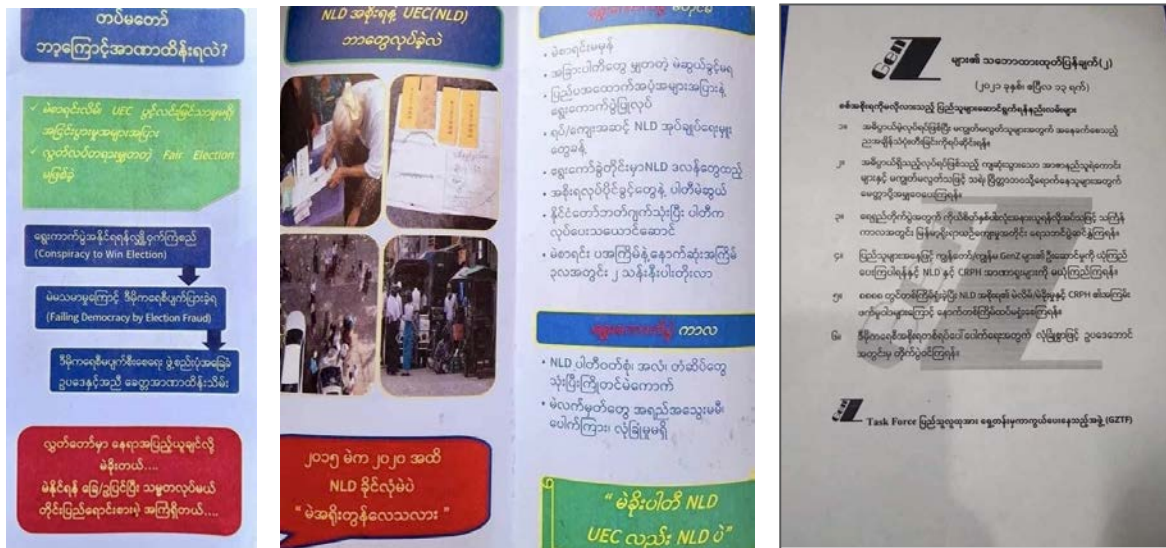


Figure 4: (left) pamphlets being handed out calling the NLD ‘vote thieves’. Figure 5: (right) pamphlets showing military support claiming to be from the Gen Z protest group, the text reads ‘people need to trust our GenZ leadership and not to trust those power-hungry NLD and [Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, CRPH].’

On 15 April 2021, reports on social media began to surface that pamphlets containing pro-regime propaganda were being disseminated in Naypyidaw (နေပြည်တော်). References to the recent Hlaing Tharyar (လှိုင်သာယာ) protest crackdowns are seen in the content of the pamphlets - specifically the fires which the pamphlet claimed were set alight by protestors. On 15 April 2021, an image was taken on Taungyo Road, near Myoma Market in Naypyidaw (နေပြည်တော်) [19.748936, 96.089975] (Figure 7). The image claims to show a police officer disseminating pamphlets that state that the NLD and CRPH are destroying the country with the help of foreign countries. However, it cannot be verified that the individual pictured here was handing out these pamphlets to cars.



Figure 6: Pamphlets claim the NLD and CRPH are destroying the country.

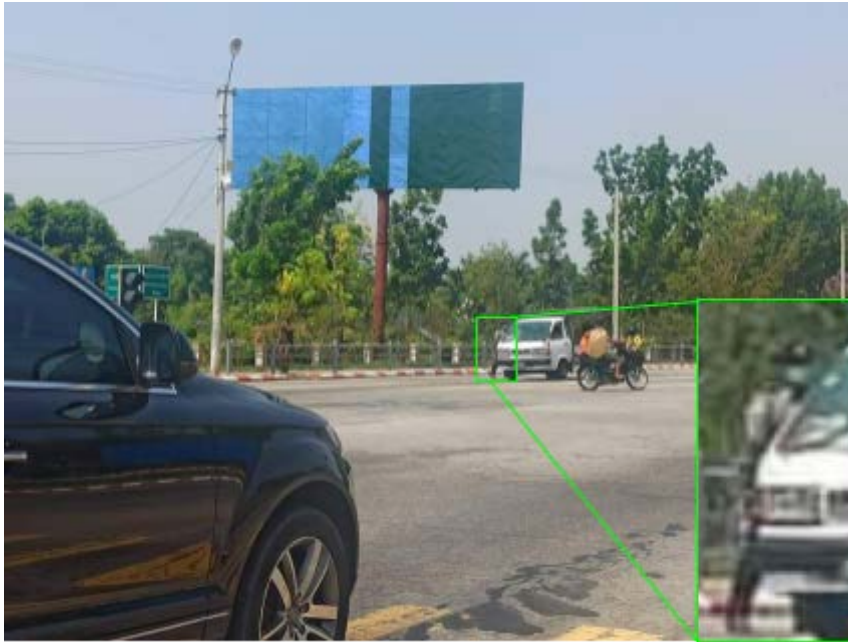


Figure 7: Image of what appears to be a uniformed individual next to a car on Taungyo Road. Figure 8

Just a day later on the 16 April 2021, in Pyay Township (ပြည်မြို့), Bago region (ပဲခူးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), it is claimed that the military were stopping cars in order to pass on similar propaganda pamphlets (Figure 9). Verification of the image attached to this claim indicates that the location is Pyay Township (ပြည်မြို့). While Myanmar Witness can confirm a time this event would have taken place in Pyay Township (ပြည်မြို့) due to shadow indication, around 0920, the date itself cannot be confirmed. Additionally, the leaflets that claim to have been disseminated by officers are a visual match for those seen in Figure 6.



Figure 9: Military pictured with what looks to be paper in their hands beside oncoming vehicles in Pyay Township. The background has been blurred by Myanmar Witness to protect the privacy of the original uploader.

Other incidents on 20 April 2021 suggest that pamphlets were being handed out in Patheingyi (ပုသိမ်ခရိုင်), Ayeyarwaddy Region (ဧရာဝတီတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), by military members with a similar pro-regime rhetoric, however these had a different aesthetic appearance (Figure 10).

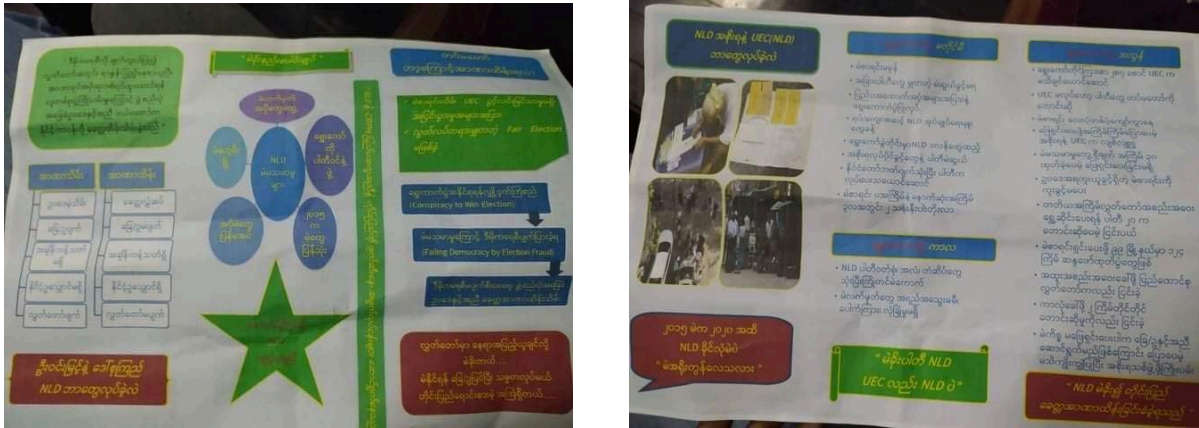


Figure 10: Pamphlets claimed to have been handed out by the military on 20 April 2021.

### June 2021

In June, reports suggest that the military was still disseminating pamphlets containing pro-regime propaganda. However, the pamphlets appear to combine more graphic imagery with claims against pro-democracy or anti-military groups (Figure 11). The reports online indicate that these pamphlets were handed out at around 0800 on 25 June 2021 at Mulashidi checkpoint - located near the Mulashidi Bridge - in Puta-O (ပူတာအိုမြို့) Township, Kachin State (ကချင်ပြည်နယ်). The pamphlet in question contained emotive language and claims that CRPH, NUG, PDF and NLD are extremists carrying out terrorist attacks in order to undermine the state administration. The same post also details that members of the military council apparently raided Myitkyinaမြို့ (မိုက်ကြီးနားမြို့), Kachin State (ကချင်ပြည်နယ်) in March 2021 and that these pro-regime pamphlets were handed out around that area.



Figure 11: Graphic imagery paired with claims against the NLD, NUG, PDFs and CRPH.

Through analysing these examples of propaganda pamphlets which had been disseminated to the population, Myanmar Witness has identified a pattern. Pro-regime pamphlets were sometimes distributed in areas where there is more resistance to military rule and where the internet had been cut by the regime. Earlier in the year, areas like Yangon (ရန်ကုန်) which had experienced aggressive protest crackdowns in March, were targeted. Internet shutdowns occurred nationwide at this time.

### November 2021 - January 2022

#### November 2021

In mid-to-late November 2021 there were reports on social media that the Myanmar military regime were distributing propaganda pamphlets using aircrafts in the Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး). This included the east villages in Kani Township (ကန်မြို့) (Figure 12) and Yinmarbin Township (ယင်းမာပင်ခရိုင်) (Figure 13).



Figure 12 (left) & Figure 13 (right): Examples of pamphlets that begin appearing and being more heavily reported on by local news media in November.

An analysis of these pamphlets reveals the narrative that Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) and the National Unity Government (NUG) are supposedly funded by illegal drug trafficking. Pamphlets which were translated by Myanmar Witness contained a message prominently at the top of the leaflet, which reads “some of the EAO and NUG’s efforts to increase drug use among young people are the biggest threats to the country’s future”. The same leaflet goes on to state that “80% of those arrested for terrorists acts were found to be under the influence of drugs” (Figure 14 and 15).



Figure 14 (left) & Figure 15 (right): Pamphlets link EAO and the NUG to illicit drugs trade in Myanmar, posted on the 18th of November.

### December 2021

At the start of December, [The Irrawaddy](#) claimed that propaganda pamphlets were airdropped in Mingin (မင်းကင်းမြို့), a town in the north-west Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) of Myanmar. These pamphlets claim that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), has been providing money and ammunition to support the killing of monks and insulting Buddhism.

A video posted on Youtube on 10 December 2021 claims to have captured footage from the 9 December 2021 demonstrating a military helicopter caught in Gangaw Township (ဂန့်ဂေါခရိုင်), Magway Region (မကွေးမြို့) – supposedly just after the dropping of pamphlets in this

area. According to local sources, the military council troops flew this helicopter in the so-called 'Yaw Region' - an area with armed tension between local PDF members and the military. The helicopter is claimed to have dropped said pamphlets in Mauk Lin (မောက်လင်း) village at around 1400. There is no mention in this video of what these pamphlets contained, but social media reports from this day and the days following indicate a likelihood that these pamphlets are similar to those dropped in November. For example, on 15 December 2021, a Facebook page posted images of pamphlets resembling the ones posted in November. The facebook page does not clarify where these pamphlets were dropped; however the translation of the page name relates the page to Kani Township (ကနီမြို့), and the news coverage the page posts about centres in and around the Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး). Similarly, social media posts made on this day, such as one by [Chindwin News Agency](#), claims that pamphlets were dropped in the Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး). These pamphlets are aesthetically similar to those seen on the ground in the post from the Facebook page: they both contain a rip at the edge of the pamphlet, on a slight curve putting into the first paragraph of a green panel with graphic imagery at the bottom (Figure 16). Thus, it could be possible that the pamphlets referenced by Chindwin News Agency are the same as those reported by the facebook page related to Kani Township (ကနီမြို့), and these pamphlets were dropped in Kani Township (ကနီမြို့).



Figure 16: Facebook page posts a picture of a pamphlet lying in the foliage with a tear.



Figure 17: (left) A picture claiming to be an aircraft retreating after dropping pamphlets. Figure 18: (right) An individual holds two pamphlets in hand.



Figure 19: White specks photographed in the air and claimed to be pamphlets being dropped by aircraft.

Claims on social media and by [local news media](#) suggest that these flyers were distributed throughout seven townships in the Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), including Debayin (ဒီပဲယင်း), at around 1300 on 15 December 2021. This local news media agency claims that a lack of access to the internet prevented access to information regarding the claims within the pamphlets. Additionally, it references the misrepresentations of the PDFs - who are extremely active in these areas.

On 20 December 2021, Twitter users claimed that airdrops of pamphlets were happening from Taze to Kyun Hla (ကျွန်းလှ) Township, Kanbalu (ကန်ဘလူ) district, in the Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး). Just a day later, on 21 December 2021, there were additional reports that aircrafts were again being used to drop off pamphlets in the southern villages of Myaing (မြိုင်မြို့), Magway. These claims cannot be verified due to the nature of the images of the pamphlets, but it is discernible that these pamphlets are all very similar aesthetically.

Additionally, on 27 December 2021, [Khit Thit Media](#) posted images of the pamphlets and claimed they were being distributed by air in Kani Township (ကနီမြို့), Yinmarbin Township (ယင်းမာပင်ခရိုင်), Mingin Township (မင်းကင်းမြို့) and Kale Township (ကလေးမြို့) in Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး). The multiple reports, by various actors, seems to indicate the possibility that these pamphlets were coming from one unified source.

## January 2022

Additional reports of similar airdropped propaganda surfaced at around 1030 on 9 January 2022 in Kamma Township (ကမ္မမြို့), Magway Region (မကွေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) (Figure 20). [Locals were reported](#) mocking these attempts by the military to sway the public with misleading narratives – for example, by asking whether aeroplane fuel is cheap. These flyers appear to be the same, if not very similar, to those from 2021. They employ the same rhetoric, suggesting that the PDFs and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) are terrorist groups causing issues in Myanmar. Additionally they threaten the destruction of cities and villages if the population continues to resist the SAC and, by extension, the military presence in these areas.



Figure 20: Pamphlets recorded in Kamma Township (ကမ္မမြို့) with the same images of Buddhist monks protesting OIC but on different panels.

On 10 January 2022, pamphlets were reportedly hand-distributed, however they were not in the same uniform aesthetic appearance as earlier pamphlets. In Hakha Hospital branch, the military were [reported](#) to be hand-distributing papers containing writing about elections which would be held in the next two years, echoing Min Aung Hlaing's declaration six months into the military coup (Figure 21). Similarly to previous flyers, they reiterate claims that the KIA and Chin National Front (CNF) are killing citizens, and that the PDF and NLD are the root cause of issues in Myanmar. According to one Facebook page, these pamphlets are actually written in the Ha Chin language, and Hakha people can barely understand them due to this not being the predominantly spoken language of the area.

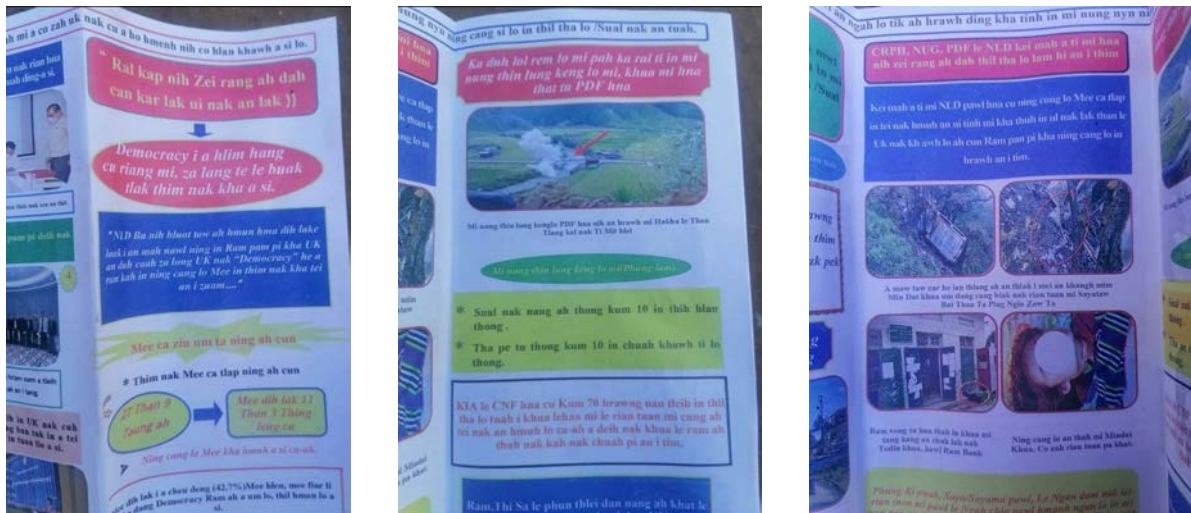


Figure 21: Slightly aesthetically different pamphlets in the Ha Chin language. They claim the CNF are responsible for the killing of citizens and include some graphic imagery.

### The Use of Aircrafts

As some of the cases mentioned here indicate, Myanmar Witness has identified a change in the reported distribution method of these pamphlets since November 2021 as compared to claims earlier in 2021. In earlier reports, the military and police forces are claimed to have disseminated propaganda leaflets to the public by hand. This resulted in more pictorial evidence of what purports to be the military and police physically handing out pamphlets. Since November 2021, however, there were far more claims that the military had dropped pamphlets from aircrafts. For example, on 15 December 2021, [The Chindwin News Agency](#) attached photographs of an aircraft in the sky, and a separate photograph showing barely visible white specks. They claimed this was the aircraft that dropped the pamphlets in parts of Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး). Unfortunately, this cannot be confirmed, and there is no way to determine if these photos were taken at the same time.

The shift to airdropping pamphlets in recent months coincides with the targeting of the lesser accessible geographic areas of Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), Magway Region (မကွေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) and Chin State (ချင်းပြည်နယ်). These regions boast active PDF forces; thus, disseminating these pamphlets on foot could be more dangerous. Additionally, as the helicopters and planes in question have not been verified or identified, this method of dissemination provides anonymity for those responsible for the pamphlets. While Myanmar Witness cannot officially confirm that the military is responsible for the pamphlets in either timeframe investigated, Myanmar Witness has discovered no evidence that any other groups active in these areas (pro or anti-regime) have access to aerial assets, including aircrafts. Although user generated content reveals what is said to be aircrafts disseminating leaflets, the footage and images could be verified by Myanmar Witness. It is difficult to fully locate the reported airdrops. Attempts to locate pictures of aircrafts taken by people on the ground presents challenges, as there is little geographic information contained within these images. The most common media formats used in support of these claims are images of aircrafts in the sky and close-up pictures of the pamphlets. These pictures can be useful to ascertain

the content of the pamphlets and confirm claims that they contain blatant misleading information and propaganda.

Local news media agencies have reported on these airdrops, such as Tachileik News Agency, and included quotes from locals whose townships have been targeted. They allude to why this method of distribution is being utilised by the military, as a form of safety and possibly anonymity:

*“ They did not dare to come by land because they were repeatedly mined and destroyed. Even now, during World War II, propaganda leaflets are being dropped by war dogs. Our locals know the ground conditions. No matter what they say, they do not trust in propaganda ”*

An analysis of the content of the pamphlets revealed similar aesthetic styles. For example, the text fonts and associated images used appear to be similar to one another, despite the fact that they are purported to be disseminated in different regions. This indicates that these pamphlets are being widely disseminated across different regions, supporting the notion that these pamphlets are organised by a unified source and use a method of transportation such as an aircraft to enable broad, coordinated reach.

According to researchers, the distribution of propaganda via airdrops can encompass a form of psychological warfare. This form of warfare is not new, its roots can be seen throughout history. Examples demonstrate that pamphlets can be scattered in the air, landing often in hostile territory where they are consumed by targeted groups with the aim to elicit a certain reaction. Notable usage of this method of communication was seen during the World Wars.

## Anti-regime Leaflets

Anti-regime activists have also been involved in the dissemination of pamphlets with more pro-democracy messaging in April 2021. These newsletters were, it is alleged on Twitter, specifically designed to inform the public of the oppressive military government, countering pro-SAC and anti-PDF claims in the pamphlets aforementioned within this research.



Figure 22: Citizens read *The Voice of Spring* Newsletters on 20 April 2021, opposing the military coup.

On 26 April 2021, it was reported on social media that activists were disseminating their own anti-regime pamphlets. Police officers are pictured (Figure 24), picking up papers that can be seen on Hledan Road in Yangon (ရန်ကင်း) around the coordinates of: 16.826524, 96.128204.



Figure 23 (left) pamphlets with anti-regime messaging. Figure 24 (right): Police are seen picking paper claimed to be these anti regime pamphlets from the ground. Pictures from MPA.



Figure 25: Papers claimed to be anti-regime pamphlets seen on Hledan Road, Yangon (ရန်ကင်း).

Pamphlets with anti-regime messaging were also circulated around mid-January 2022. For example, [Students](#) of the Communist Party of Burma (Ba Ka Tha) distributed pamphlets criticising the education system in Myanmar, to students and teachers in Yangon (ရန်ကင်း). These pamphlets outlined their aims to ‘liberate’ the education system from the military government’s style of teaching, and replace it with ‘democratic education’. The low-budget design of these leaflets also indicates the disparity in resources available to non-government actors, and thus reinforces the suggestion that the military are producing the pro-regime pamphlets analysed within this investigation. However, this is merely an observation that cannot be independently verified.

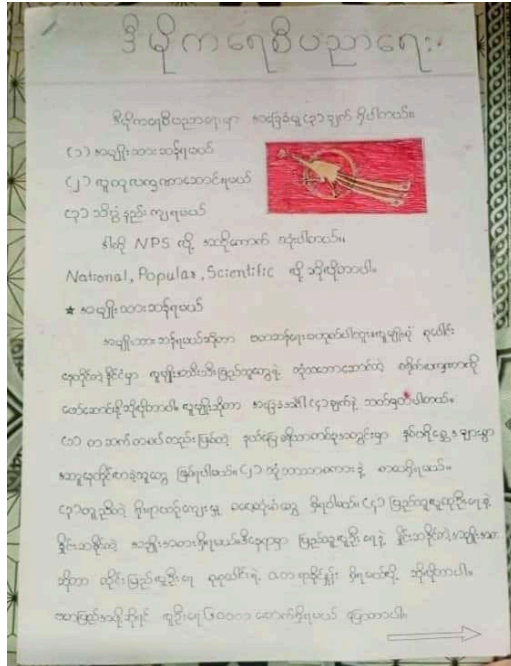
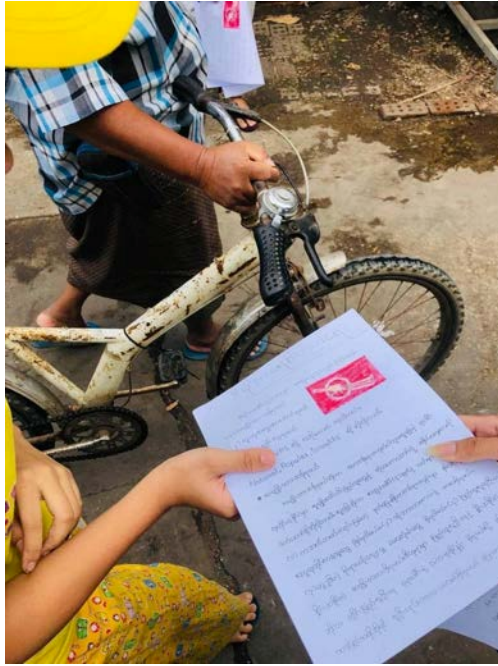


Figure 26 (left): Students hand out anti-military pamphlets that criticise the pro-regime education system in Yangon (ရန်ကုန်). Figure 27 (right) close up of this pamphlet.

It is crucial to highlight reports that attempts to disseminate pro-democracy information pamphlets in Myanmar have often been met with aggression from military forces. In Yangon (ရန်ကုန်), Thingangyun Township (သင်္ဃန်းကျွန်း မြို့နယ်), it is reported that youths were stopped and arrested for distributing anti-regime pamphlets at an overpass - pictured in a social media post and located by Myanmar Witness to 16.841909, 96.204511 (Figure 28). The individual who posted this content also claims that this took place at around 1500 on 5 February 2022. While Myanmar Witness has been unable to confirm the date, there is no indication that this picture was uploaded online before 5 February 2022. Myanmar Witness was able to carry out an investigation of this image using shadow analysis available through SunCalc. This revealed that if this image was taken on the date suggested, the shadows corroborate that the time would have been around 1500 (Figure 29).



Figure 28: Military personnel pictured walking with a plain clothed individual away from an underpass.

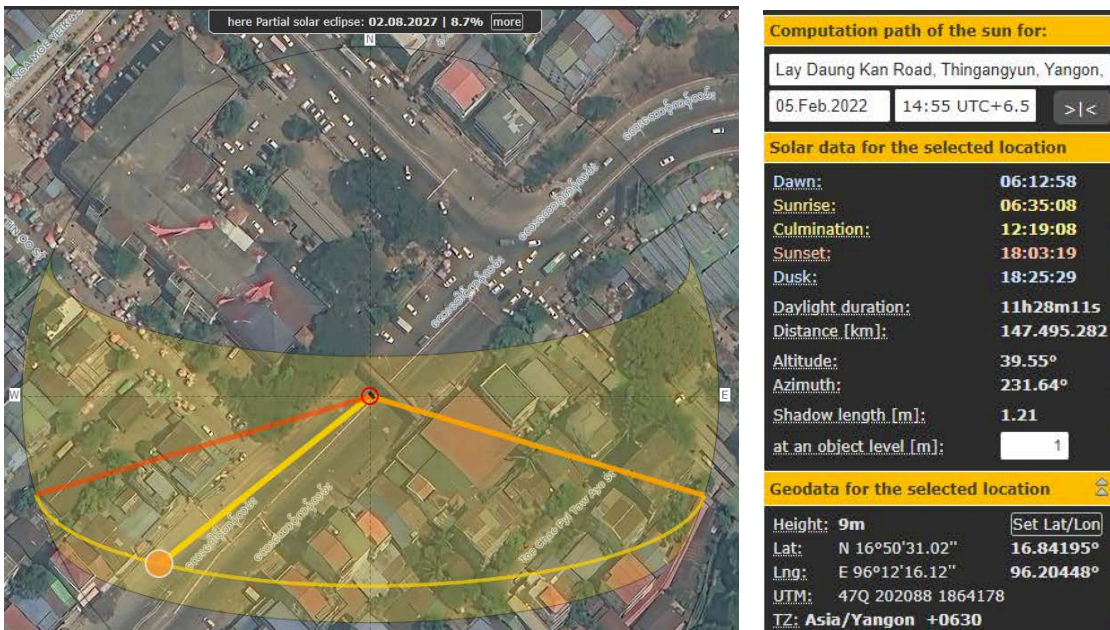


Figure 29: Shadow imagery confirms the time alleged in the post for the incident of individuals being picked up by the military for disseminating anti-regime messaging.

It is also reported that the youths were then beaten with the butt of military rifles; rifles that can be seen in the image above (Figure 28). However, there is no additional media related to this claim and Myanmar Witness cannot confirm that this photo was taken on the date alleged nor that it was related to the inhumane treatment of individuals handing out anti-regime protest pamphlets.

# Pamphlet Discourse Analysis

## Design

While there are similarities, the design of the pamphlets has varied over the timeframes investigated. This is specifically evident within the reports of pamphlets identified within the April to June 2021 timeframe. These pamphlets are generally colourful, with variation in their structure, the type of images used, and content.

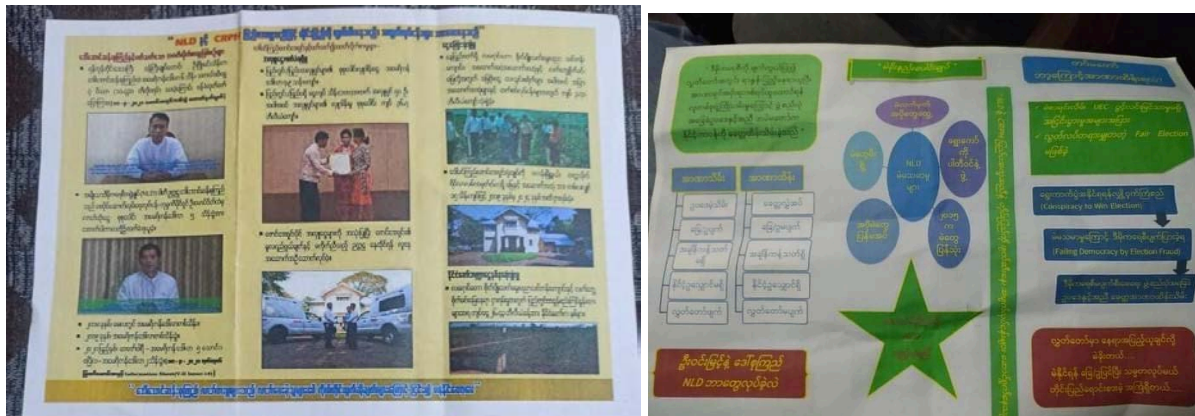


Figure 30: (left) Pamphlets claimed to have been handed out by the military on 20 April 2021. Figure 31: (right) Pamphlets claim the NLD and CRPH are destroying the country on 15 April 2021.

After November 2021, the majority of images of pamphlets appearing on social media and within news reports appear to be aesthetically similar, with similarities in the images used, and content. However, this is not always the case. A minority of cases identified - for example, the pamphlets which were reportedly disseminated in Hakha (ဟားခါးမြို့), Chin State (ချင်းပြည်နယ်) - do not reflect the same aesthetic patterns as the majority of reports.

Despite this, the large number of reports regarding pamphlets with a uniform style, lends support to the notion that these particular pamphlets originated from one source. Those responsible for these pamphlets must have had the resources for their creation and mass dissemination, including by air distribution should these claims be verified. Local PDF groups or counter-regime groups in the areas in question have limited resources which might restrict their ability to create the quantity of printed pamphlets reported, to disseminate pamphlets around many different townships or even regions.



Figure 32 Comparison of some images claimed to have been taken on different dates between November 2021 - January 2022.

## Sowing Religious and Political Division

### Language and Contents

Throughout this investigation, Myanmar Witness has analysed the language and messages embedded within the pamphlets. These fall mostly within the realm of misinformation or unverified information, and target the many different opposition groups in Myanmar - political groups, defence groups, and ethnic organisations.

As mentioned in this report, some of the pamphlets reported in November centred around the narrative that EAOs and the NUG are funded by illegal drug trafficking. This could be to delegitimise their claims against the military government. This would not be the first time that EAOs, specifically the Arakan Army (AA), have been linked to the illicit drug trade. In 2019, [Myanmar Now](#) reported police claims that locals had been caught trying to shift illicit drugs to the Rakhine State (ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်) capital, providing assistance to the AA in the illicit drugs trade. Claims like this, [Myanmar Now](#) reports, are supposed to tarnish AA's reputation among members of the local and international community, as well as delegitimise their fight for more autonomy in Myanmar's border areas.

In 2019, [NPR](#) reported that Jeremy Douglas - regional director for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Bangkok - believes the illicit drug trade in Myanmar is much bigger now than it was decades ago, when the area was better known for its opium and heroin production. In the post-coup context, making unverified claims linking EAOs and the NUG to drug trafficking could represent an attempt to delegitimise anti-regime groups, discredit the pro-democracy party in the next set of elections (should they go ahead) and hold them responsible for the country's lucrative narcotics industry.

Myanmar Witness translated a message at the top of one of the reported leaflets, it reads: *“some of the EAO and NUG's efforts to increase drug use among young people are the biggest threats to the country's future”*. The same leaflet continues to state that: *“80% of those arrested for terrorists acts were found to be under the influence of drugs”* (Figure 33 and 34). However, the Myanmar military government did not publish statistics on the consumption of drugs that can be used to support this claim. This pattern is also reflected by state-affiliated media, such as the GNLM, which often links protesters with drug use. This further supports the notion that these pamphlets were created and disseminated by

state-affiliated organisations. As well as implicating EAOs and the NUG with the illicit drug market, these allegations appear to hold them responsible for acts of terror, and the 'poisoning' of 'the minds' of the youth.



Figure 33 (left) & Figure 34 (right): Pamphlets link EAO and the NUG to illicit drugs trade in Myanmar, posted on the 18th of November.

On 15 December 2021, [The Chindwin News Agency](#) detailed the contents of the pamphlets which had been reportedly distributed via airdrops. In these pamphlets, the CRPH, NUG and PDF are labelled as ‘terrorists’, and blamed for inciting violence. PDF members are reported to be the cause of the chaos and violence in the country - a result of their anti-regime rhetoric and actions. These accusations are occasionally accompanied by violent imagery that can be seen on these pamphlets: people injured and dead; people being arrested; and, phrases such as ‘အကြမ်းဖက်သောင်းကျန်းသူအဖွဲ့ ကချင်ပြည်နယ်မှ’, which translates as ‘*terrorist insurgent group from Kachin State*’. These pamphlets also used shocking or graphic imagery alongside these messages. The pairing of these images with potentially biased information about pro-democracy or anti-regime groups, may serve multiple purposes, including delegitimising these groups, providing a warning to those who support them, or eliciting emotions - disgust, for example. For example, pamphlets reported by locals in the [Democratic Voice of Burma](#) on 15 December 2021, blame the PDF and other “insurgency” movements for villages being set on fire and schools being bombed. Brutal images are paired with the captions blaming PDFs. As pamphlets such as this one have been distributed during internet shutdowns which prevent the public from fact-checking information, this could lead the public to believe that violence is being committed by anti-regime groups. According to locals in this report, the reverse is true.

Additionally, these pamphlets are reported to contain thinly veiled threats towards those who might be involved with anti-regime groups. They threaten the public with the military’s notorious “four cuts” strategy - the targeting of “every person and village” that the military deems to be connected to insurgent groups - in a bid to suppress resistance ([Sydney Morning Herald](#), 2021). These act as warnings to villages, indicating that they will be destroyed should connections with anti-regime groups be identified.

## The Use of Anti-muslim Rhetoric

As previously stated, [The Irrawaddy](#) claimed that propaganda pamphlets with anti-muslim rhetoric were airdropped in Mingin (မင်းကင်းမြို့), Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) on 1 December 2021. These pamphlets claim that the OIC has been providing money and ammunition to support the killing of monks and insulting Buddhism. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), an international organisation which focusses on the protection of Muslim populations and condemns attacks on these populations, have [publically condemned](#) the actions of the military in Rakhine State (ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်) towards the Rohingya between 2017 and the time of writing. This context lends support to the claim that the military could have been involved in the production and dissemination of these pamphlets, in an attempt to delegitimise the OIC. The actors involved in the dissemination of such pamphlets appear to be attempting to fuel religious tensions through the spreading of anti-OIC propaganda, by claiming that these groups have incited violence against Buddhism through the mere existence of Muslims in Myanmar.

Interestingly, pre-coup physical pamphlets with similar sentiments were reported by [The Irrawaddy](#) in October 2019 having been dropped in the streets. The pamphlets are described as having ‘anti-government’ [NLD led at the time] content and specifically mentions the use of a racial slur specific to Muslim people in the context of hate speech, as well as criticising the government for “failing to protect its own race and religion”. These pamphlets were reported to the police but those specific people responsible have not since been discovered.

In June 2021, [Frontier](#) reported that social media posts by pro-regime actors focused on claims that ethnic armed groups and the OIC were terrorists. The oft applied stereotype of religious extremism was used in regards to the Muslim populations, to justify the killing of protesters, clearance operations in Rakhine (ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်), and the violent governance the military council have imposed since the Coup. The text in a pamphlet investigated by Myanmar Witness read: *“more than 10 percent of Burma’s population is Muslim. They will be happy that Buddhists are killing each other”*. This misinformation, including the statistic that around 10% of Myanmar’s population is Muslim, can be refuted by looking into freely available census information. However, this may be impossible for those living in the areas which face internet cuts. The conjecture that Muslims would be ‘happy’ about Myanmar’s conflict also appears problematic

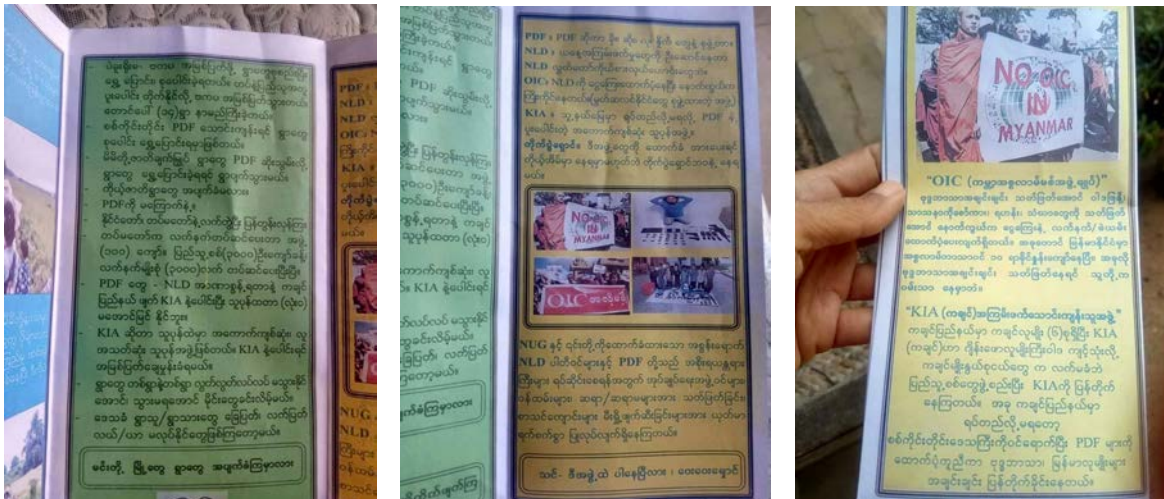


Figure 35: Pamphlet takes aim at IOC and pairs this with images of Buddhists, Myanmar is a buddhist majority country, protesting the IOC.

Later into December 2021, additional pamphlets pin blame for the fracturing of the country on Muslim-minority populations in Myanmar and the OIC. This may serve to deepen religious tensions and create distrust towards Muslim minorities. Chris Sidoti - an investigator on the UN's 2019 probe into the treatment of the Rohingya people in Rakhine State (ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်) - [said](#) the strategy of stoking religious tensions was *"in line with what the military have been doing for generations"*. This rhetoric encourages discontent with Muslims and anti-military groups, as seen in the 2017 Rakhine clearance operations, which targeted the Rohingya, a minority Muslim group. The narratives and patterns of behaviour identified in this investigation and by the UN's probe, could not only support claims that the military are dropping these pamphlets but also, worryingly, indicate the repeat of behaviours which occurred in the lead up to the clearance operations in the Rakhine State (ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်).

### Imagery

**[Warning: Graphic]** Myanmar Witness has also identified imagery within these leaflets which reflects the misinformation and unverified information included in the pamphlets. Within multiple pamphlets there is a 'FACT CHECKED' stamp, which appears to suggest that this information has been independently verified. Figure 36 provides an example of the fact check symbol seen in these pamphlets. In this example, it is in relation to claims that *'violence is being led by former NLD MPs'* followed by the name and locations of those implicated in 'the violence'. This includes former NLD Health Minister U Myint Htwe and Aung Tun Lwin, Region Hluttaw MP of Minkin NLD. Since the coup, both of these individuals have been criticised by the GNLM for [forming](#) or [leading](#) the PDF. They highlight that former NLD MP Phyo Zay Yar Thaw was arrested on 18 November 2021 and had 20 guns confiscated in Yangon (ရန်ကုန်). According to [Myanmar Now](#), the rationale for his arrest was that he was [allegedly](#) the mastermind behind numerous attacks on the regime. The pamphlet seen in Figure 36 also includes images of weapons, the arrested individuals, and additional images associated with pro-democracy protest violence. However, arrests of former NLD members and pro-democracy activists have been contested online on the basis of their rationale. Where the 'fact checked' stamps are present, the pamphlets appear to echo the

sentiments of the military regime without providing further information about how this information was verified or ‘fact checked’.

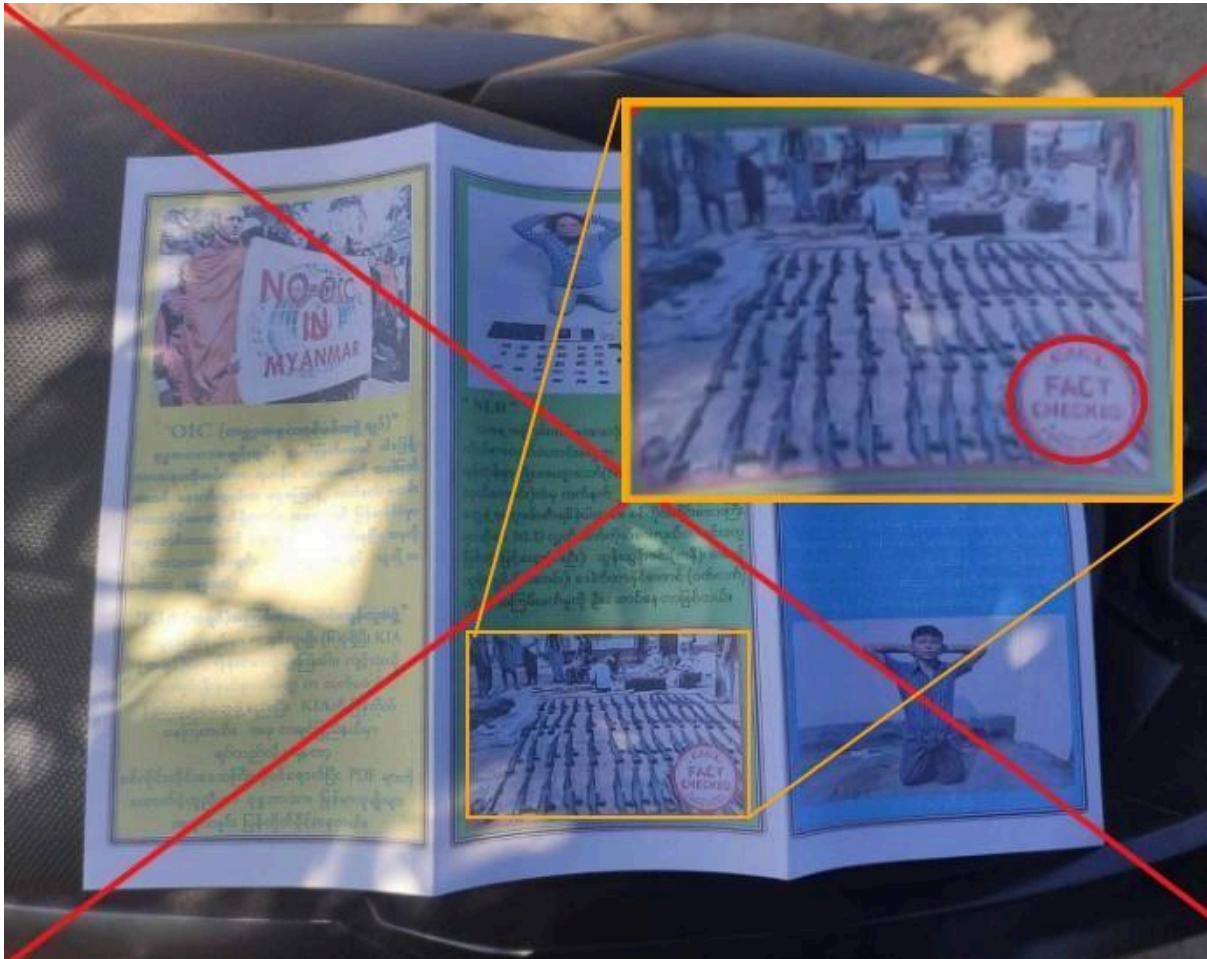


Figure 36: Some of the text on a green panel translates to ‘Former NLD MPs Myint Htwe (Ye Oo) Tun Win (Kany); Aung Tun Lwin (Minkin) and Dr Naing Aung (Wet Let) are leading the violence.’ This has allegedly been fact checked, though the pamphlets do not expand on how this was achieved.

On 12 April 2021, the [state media](#) outlet GNLM, mentioned Hlaing Tharyar (လှိုင်သာယာ) for one of the first times since the crackdown. While they fail to mention the countless deaths recorded in this instance of violence, they highlight that factories were razed and fires were set alight by protesters. As aforementioned (see: page 9) on 15 April 2021, reports began to surface on social media explaining that pamphlets containing pro-regime propaganda were disseminated in Naypyidaw. These reports included images of the pamphlets in question, which referenced protests, destruction of property, and fires. One of these pamphlets included reports of the Hlaing Tharyar (လှိုင်သာယာ) protest and provided images of one of the fires on a road in Hlaing Township (လှိုင် မြို့နယ်) [geolocated by Myanmar Witness to 16.858589, 96.106885] and claims that factories were destroyed. The timing of the reports

by GNLM and the distribution of the pamphlets lends credence to the suggestion that the pro-regime actors could have designed and disseminated the pamphlets to the public, highlighting narratives about the protests that obscure the deaths and injuries seen in such protests. Myanmar Witness has published [Violence Against Protestors at Hlaing Tharyar](#) for more information on this.



Figure 37: Images of the pamphlets reportedly handed out in Naypyidaw, containing images of destruction, including those relating to the Hlaing Tharyar protests. Highlighted: one of the pieces of text reads ‘Hlaing Thar Yar Industrial Zones; Shwepyithar Industrial Zone and 13 factories in Insein Township were set on fire.’ underneath a red title accusing NLD and CRPH of using foreign aid to harm Myanmar.

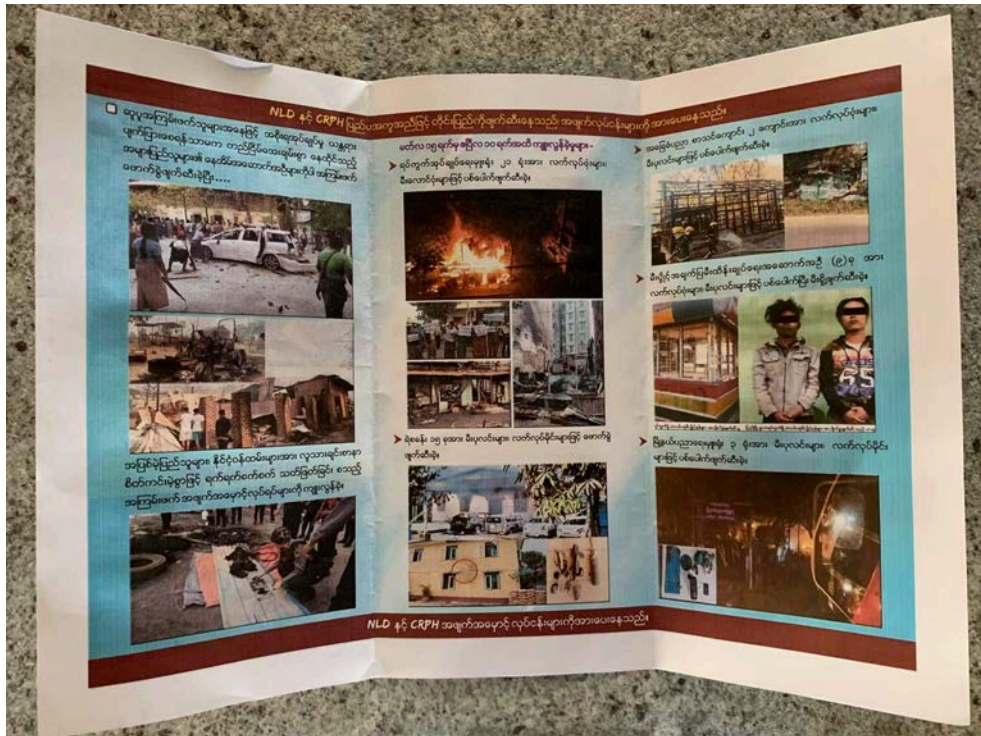


Figure 38: Images of the pamphlets reportedly handed out in Naypyidaw, containing images of destruction, some of which are attributed to anti-regime activists and protesters.

In June 2021, pamphlets containing pro-regime narratives were still being disseminated, allegedly by the military. However, this period of time reflects a change in the severity of the messages used. The pamphlets continued to contain misleading information, in line with the pamphlets reported in the earlier part of 2021, but they began to include more shocking, graphic, and violent imagery. Additionally, they contained coordinated claims against pro-democracy or anti-military groups alongside these images. For example, pamphlets distributed in June 2021 began to use terms like ‘cutthroat NLD’ paired with images of dead or wounded individuals (images which are blurred). This is markedly different from those seen in April 2021. Earlier pamphlets contained pictures of fire and destruction but not, from what is visible in online reports, images of wounded or dead individuals.



Figure 39: Graphic imagery paired with claims against the NLD, NUG, PDFs and CRPH.

Myanmar Witness are unable to confirm why there is a shift in the nature of the pamphlets. However, there are repeated claims that graphic images were included across different, yet aesthetically uniform, pamphlets since November 2021 (Figure 40), as well as within the aesthetically different pamphlets seen in Hakha (ဟားခါးမြို့) pamphlets in January 2022 (see the section on design).

One such pamphlet identified by Myanmar Witness appears to be designed strategically with this graphic imagery (Figure 40). On the first yellow panel, it expresses how many PDFs have been killed, paired with graphic imagery allegedly of PDFs. The middle section includes disparaging messages about PDFs and their actions. The final panel expresses that “more than 3,000 militias have been formed in Sagaing Division to counter the PDF terrorists violence”, accompanied by imagery which claims to show anti-PDF militias, perhaps undertaking training. One such image has been pulled from a Facebook account of a pro-military actor and possible Pyu Saw Htee member identified by Myanmar Witness. This kind of design layout and inclusion of graphic imagery could seek to demonstrate the power of pro-military groups, disparage and condemn opposition groups like the PDF, and encourage those who are not pro-military or part of local pro-military militias to sign up.

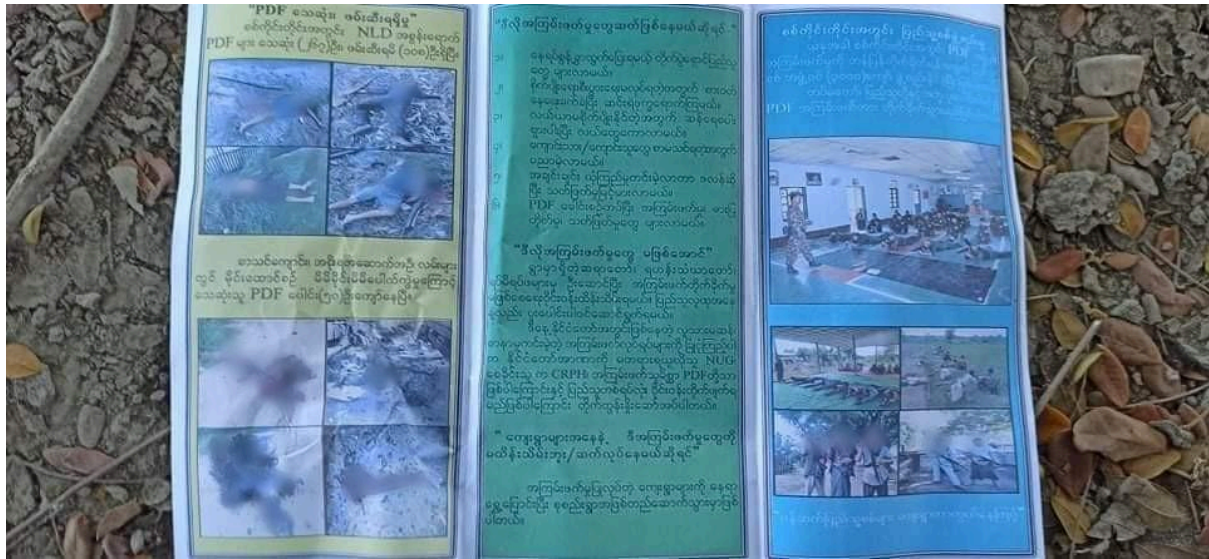


Figure 40: Graphic imagery paired on the yellow panel of this pamphlet with disparaging messages against the NLD and PDFs. Graphic imagery and faces have been censored by Myanmar Witness.

### Intimidation: The Use of Warning Pamphlets

Concurrently with these propaganda pamphlets, Myanmar Witness also identified a form of paper notices that were reported online and by news media. These notices appear to more directly warn and - in some cases - threaten villages with either legal or undisclosed consequences for direct or indirect involvement with anti-regime activity. This section will outline a number of the trends found.

#### November 2021

On 22 November 2021, some of the first reports of paper notices which explicitly threatened a village with military aggression were identified by Myanmar Witness on social media. These leaflets were reported in Yae Myet (ရေမြက်) village, located in Ye-U Township (ရေဦးမြို့နယ်), within the Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး). However, as the surroundings of the notice cannot be verified, Myanmar Witness cannot confirm that the notice has been put up in Ye-U (ရေဦးမြို့နယ်). Following this instance, Myanmar Witness has identified additional warning pamphlets.

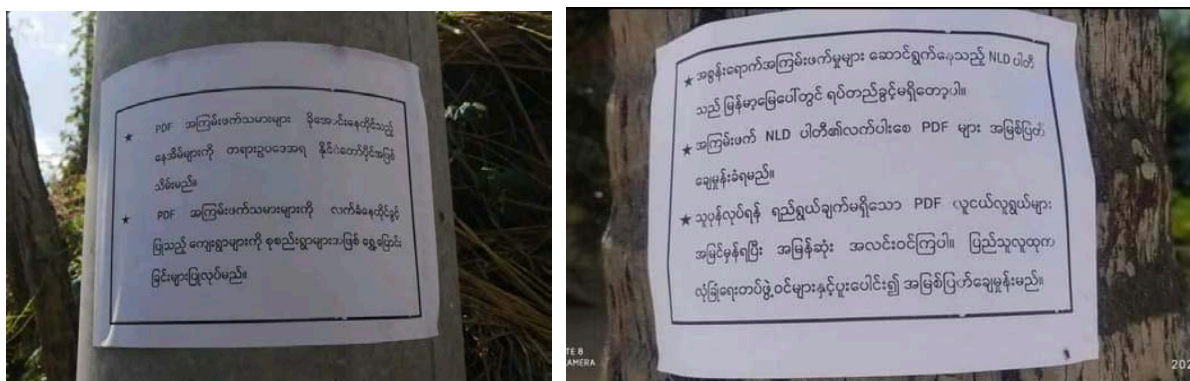


Figure 41: Warning pamphlets on poles in Yae Myet village in November, a month before an attack on this village.

According to a translation from a Myanmar Witness investigator, the signs read as follows: “The houses which are found to be a PDF hiding place will be legally confiscated”, “the villages which are found with PDF hiding will be migrated as collective villages”, “NLD party are doing terrorist activities, there is no place for [The NLD] in Myanmar”, “PDF who are puppets of the NLD must be uprooted” and “the youths who are not intending to be an insurgent should surrender and join with security forces”. Just a month later, on 20 December 2021, Myanmar Witness recorded claims that this village was attacked by the military. Fires in this village were recorded on the Fire Information and Resource Management System ([FIRMS](#)) on 20 December 2021. Myanmar Witness geolocated [images](#) of destroyed buildings to this village [at around 22.866608, 95.208814], confirming the location of the images and claims made in the post of the date aligning with the FIRMS data.



Figure 42: Geolocation of burned houses and destruction in Yae Myet village.

This is a worrying precedent to set. The threats have become more frequent during the timeframe investigated, indicating that more locations could be at risk of attacks. Despite this, it is important to note that at the time of reporting, these threats do not seem to have been acted upon in other locations. Regardless of whether the threats are followed through, they appear to provide a method of intimidation, used against the population.

## December 2021

In Budalin Township (ဘုတလင်မြို့ကို), located in Monywa district (မုံရွာမြို့) of Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), [reports](#) suggest that flyers were distributed at the roadside, or left directly on roads. According to an anonymous local, these flyers were thrown out of military vehicles early on the morning of 27 December 2021 at around 0800. These flyers apparently contain a request from the Budalin PDF for civilians to vacate the Budalin Township (ဘုတလင်မြို့ကို) area from 30 December 2021 to 1 January 2022 so that the PDF can effectively respond to military violence. The leaflets were signed by the Budalin Township's youth coalition (a wing of the local PDF). These flyers don't resemble either the pamphlets spreading misleading or unverified information, or the warning pamphlets explored within this section of the report. However, local Budalin PDF alleged that the flyers were not created by the PDFs and no such plans for vengeance against military members existed which would

require people to vacate the area. In another leaflet distributed in Budalin Township (ဘုတလင်မြို့နယ်), the PDF expresses this sentiment, rejecting claims in the earlier notices.

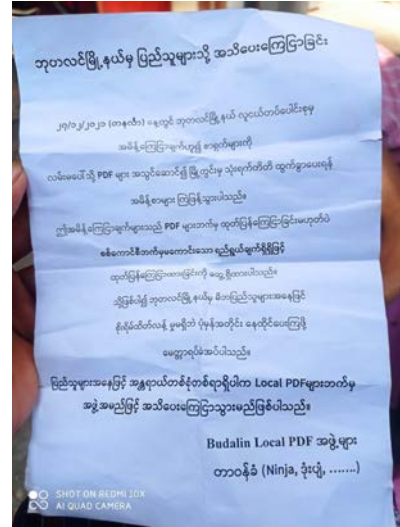
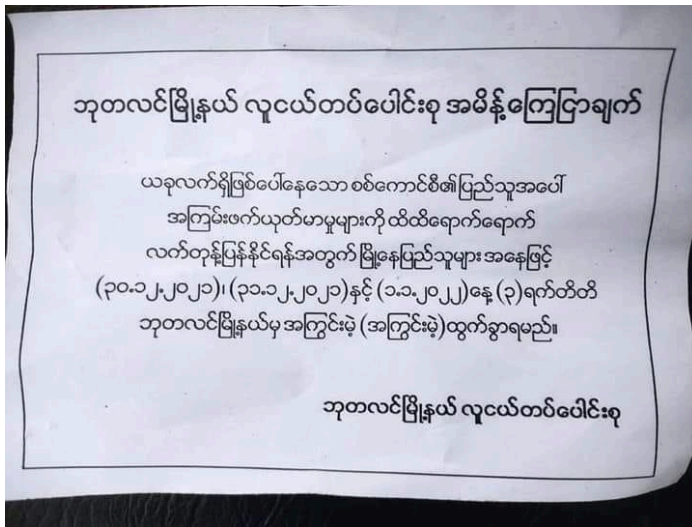


Figure 43: (left) Paper asking residents to evacuate Budalin, signing off as a Youth Coalition. Figure 44: (right) Retaliatory letters claiming the last were not made by local defence forces.

According to the local PDFs, the spreading of these flyers is intended to make the people of Budalin fear their administration. They claim that the SAC is trying to improve its control of Budalin, allowing them to accomplish strict checks and tests on residents. The post doesn't elaborate on what these tests and checks are, but it is likely in reference to the checks the police and military perform on civilians if they are deemed suspicious or involved in PDF activity. An example of this includes [mobile phone checks](#) and vehicle 'security checks'. These checks have often resulted in violence, and even the [military government](#) have revealed that the checks have resulted in deaths.

### January 2021

On 5 January 2022, [BBC Burma Live](#) reported that, according to reports from locals, the military had been distributing pamphlets with warning signs of air strikes around the Mandalay-Bhamo highway, at the intersection near Mya Taung village (မြတောင်ကျေးရွာ), Katha Township (ကသာ မြို့နယ်). These pamphlets warn people to mark pagodas, schools and hospitals in the morning to avoid airstrikes targeting them. These reports are hard to confirm as no such attacks have been reported in this particular area. However, it did urge local defence forces to refrain from air attacks - the PDF had reportedly carried out drone attacks against the military - and prompted them to start building shelters. This reaction supports the notion that the pamphlet wasn't created by the PDF. Additionally, if the pamphlet was distributed by the military or pro-regime forces, it could have intended to remove PDF focus from proactive anti-military activity and instil fear in those living in this area.

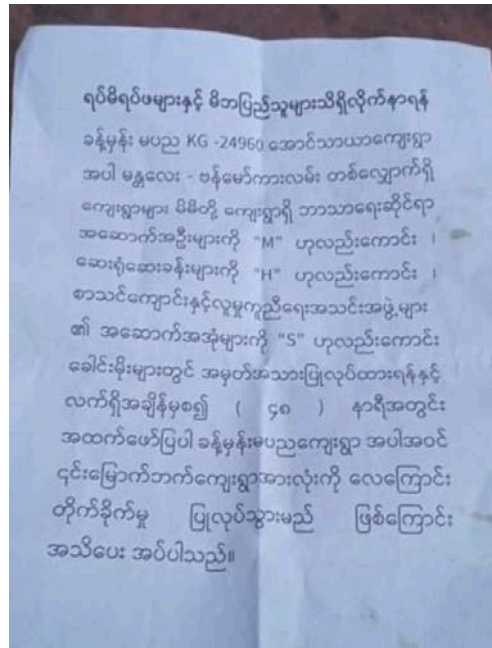


Figure 45: BBC Burma reports that these pamphlets, threatening Katha township with airstrikes, were disseminated by military personnel.

According to another [media source](#), a local woman was killed and several others were injured in airstrikes by aircrafts on 4 January 2022 in Gahe (ဂဟဲ) village, Htigyaing (ထီးချိုင့်) Township, Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး). Locals reported that the next day, the military had dropped pamphlets threatening to bomb villages in Htigyaing (ထီးချိုင့်) Township (Figure 46), but neither of these reports have been independently verified by Myanmar Witness. At the time of writing, Myanmar Witness has been unable to identify any airstrikes in this area and reports do not confirm casualties related to these threats.

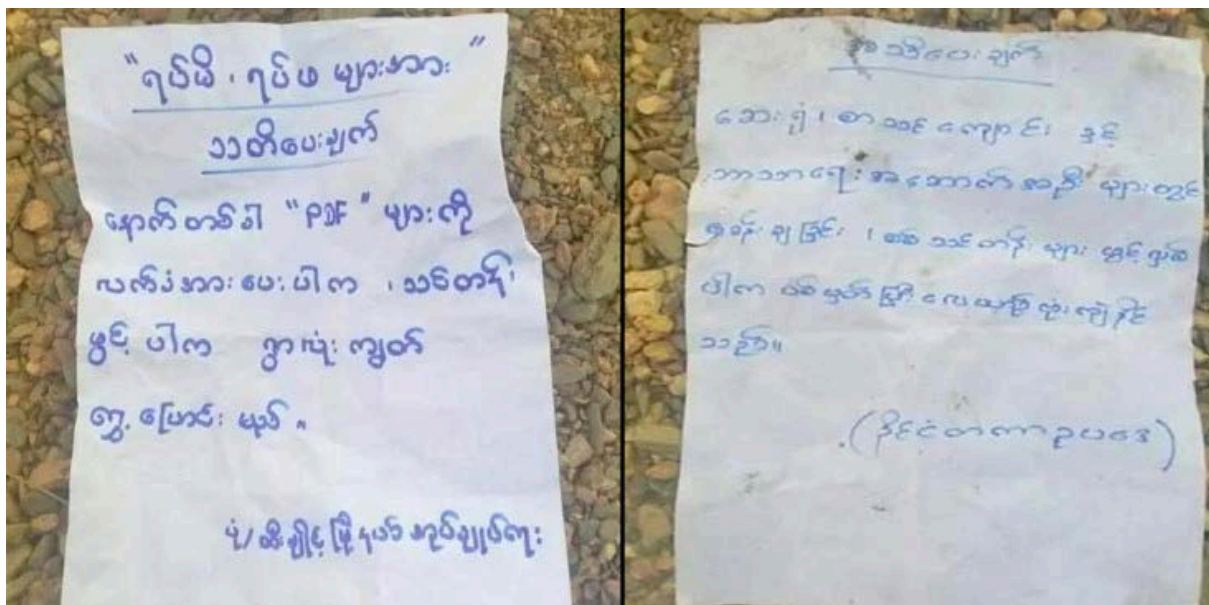


Figure 46: Handwritten warnings in Htigyaing (ထီးချိုင့်) Township.

On 18 January 2022, similar threats of airstrikes were claimed to have been hand distributed to villagers in Htigyaing (ထီးချိုင့်) Township, Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) (Figure 46). Both this threat (which appears hand-written), and the printed leaflet shown above (Figure 45), differ from the propaganda seen earlier in this investigation. These resemble targeted warning notices rather than information pamphlets. Additionally, there are differences in regards to the attention to detail, colouring, and use of imagery. Despite these differences, there does appear to be similarities between the thinly veiled threats embedded in the propaganda pamphlets and the more outright warnings of violence within these notices. However, there is no clear way to confirm or deny that these were given to villagers by the military, as the news source claims.

Evidence emerged that another Silent Strike was planned for 1 February 2022 - the anniversary of the Coup. On 26 January 2022, Myanmar Spring reported that plain-clothed military individuals in the Mandalay region (မန္တလေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) distributed pamphlets to shops, encouraging individuals not to participate in the Silent Strike. Similar pamphlets were also reportedly distributed in other places, including Mawlamyine (မော်လမြိုင်မြို့) in Mon state (မွန်ပြည်နယ်). Pamphlets were [reportedly](#) given out at the intersection of Sagaing-Mandalay Road, Yadanarbon University at the Yadanar Market; however, this cannot be confirmed. Given that there are reports of the distribution of similar letters in multiple locations across the country, the likelihood that these claims were fake is reduced.

The warning notices and pamphlets identified by Myanmar Witness contain threats of legal action: the SAC threatens to sue under 52(A), 505(A), 124(A) of the national penal code and also the Electronic Transaction Law (Amended on [15 February 2021](#), to introduce a broad exception allowing the government to confiscate personal data, and a prohibition on sharing various types of information online).<sup>2</sup> This action can be taken if shops close on this date or participate in any way with the CRPH's strike announcement. The pamphlets also reiterate the misleading information aforementioned in this report, that the CRPH and NUG are seeking to destabilise the country, possibly in an attempt to dissuade the population from engaging with the Silent Strike.

<sup>2</sup> Since taking office, the Myanmar Military have installed new sections to the penal code specific to curbing online and in person freedom of expression. [52\(A\)](#) criminalises harbouring people or 'supplying a person with shelter, food, drink, money, clothes, anus, ammunition... assisting a person by any means... to evade apprehension.' [Section 505A](#) of the Penal Code, instituted on 14 February 2021, is a provision criminalising comments delegitimising the coup and the military government, as well as comments that 'cause fear' [505A(a)], spread 'false news' [505A(b)], or 'agitates directly or indirectly a criminal offence against a Government employee' [505A(c)]. This section commands a sentence of up to three years, not bailable in prison for violations, which used to be two years in prison before February 2021. [124\(A\)](#) criminalises "any attempt to bring into hatred or contempt, or excite disaffection towards the government".

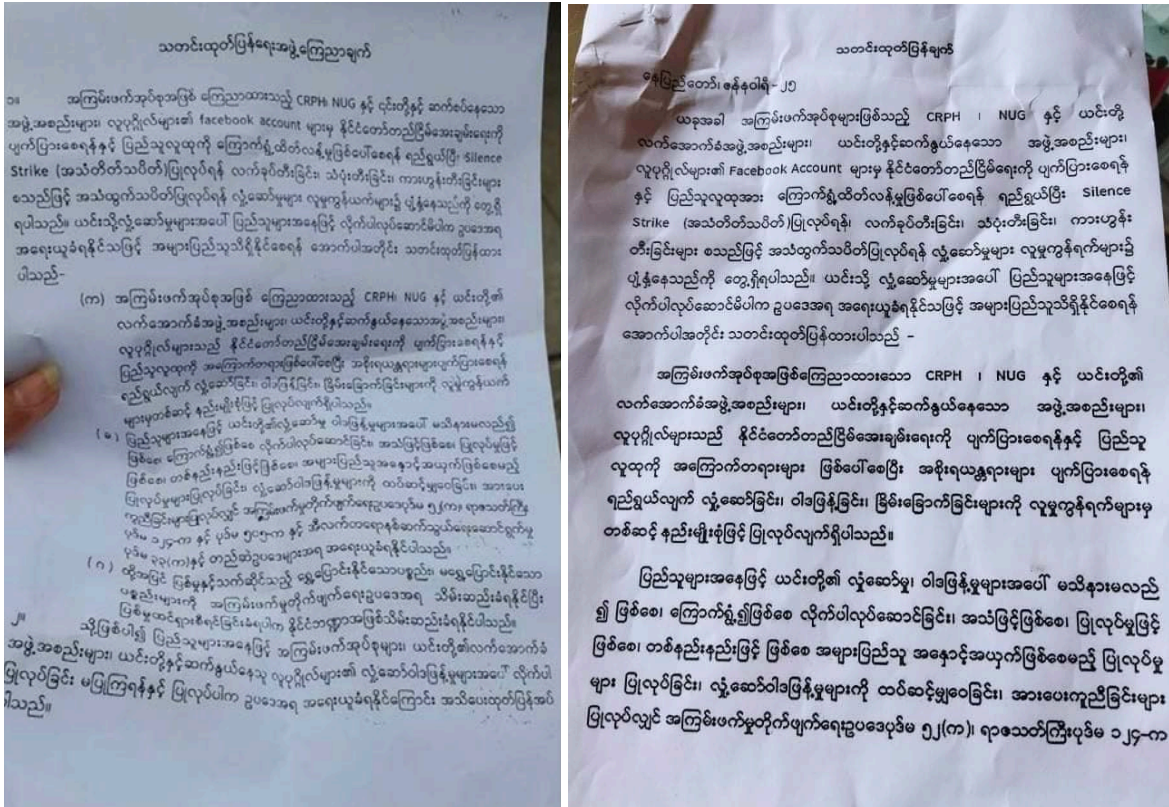


Figure 47: Letters of warning telling people not to participate in the silent strike in Yangon (ရန်ကုန်).

A day later, the same exact messaging appears on a large message board reportedly in Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), threatening the public and warning them not to participate in the Silent Strike (Figure 48). Interestingly, these message boards appeared just days after the initial reports that these pamphlets were handed out. This could support claims that security forces had handed out the pamphlets before putting up this sign, as the sign is identical. It is also reported that the plain-clothed security forces seen handing out pamphlets, were also seen sticking the notices on poles. Additionally, in Myitkyina (မြစ်ကြီးနားမြို့), Kachin State (ကချင်ပြည်နယ်), locals have been threatened with jail time on message boards if they were to participate in the Silent Strike on 1 February 2022 (Figure 49).



Figure 48: Message board with the same inscription as seen in figure 18, threatening locals with legal action if they were to participate in the silent strike.



Figure 49: A sign board threatening locals with jail time if they were to participate in the silent strike.

### February 2021

On 8 February 2022 claims made on [Telegram](#) suggest that more handwritten notes had emerged containing threatening language, and which appear to implicate the PDF. In Ahr Lar Kat Pa (အလ္လကပု), Myinmu (မြင်းမူ) in Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), locals received a handwritten paper containing threats of extortion. The paper was attributed to

local defence forces; however, local defence forces vehemently denied writing it. Neither these claims, nor the denials can be verified.

On 27 February 2022 another Telegram post [claimed that](#), in Pakokku (ပခုက္ကူ) district in Magway Region (မကွေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး), the military council and the Pyu Saw Htee, a pro-military aligned local group, threatened to use force, in accordance with the law, against those who helped the PDF groups. It is claimed by locals that the military distributed pamphlets along the Pakokku-Myaing road. Like the materials reviewed earlier in this report, these leaflets referred to the PDF as terrorists and included the names and addresses of fourteen businesses in Pakokku (ပခုက္ကူ), threatening them with legal action for assisting local defense forces. This represents a threat on the personal safety of the individuals in question. Additionally, the [Telegram](#) post claims that, on the morning of 25 February 2022 a few days before these leaflets appeared, local defence forces opened fire on the municipal office in Pakokku (ပခုက္ကူ), killing one officer and one soldier. A vehicle was also claimed to have been destroyed and several others injured in a roadside bomb attack on a military convoy. These reports have not been confirmed.

## Conclusion

Open-source analysis conducted by Myanmar Witness has identified a number of claims on social media and in the news media that pamphlets have been distributed within Myanmar, containing delegitimising messaging about anti-regime groups. Myanmar Witness was able to use geolocation to identify the locations within the images that were posted alongside the social media claims. This enabled Myanmar Witness to identify locations where social media users have claimed that pamphlets have been disseminated by pro-regime actors and security forces. Despite multiple reports being gathered throughout this investigation, Myanmar Witness is unable to verify whether it was indeed the military disseminating these pamphlets.

The dissemination of the pamphlets revealed a number of patterns. For example, in the early part of 2021, the pamphlets targeted urbanised areas like Yangon (ရန်ကင်း) and Bago (ပဲခူးမြို့), locations of known dissent against the military coup, with additional reports of distributions within Kachin State (ကချင်ပြည်နယ်). However, from November 2021 to January 2022, reports were more concentrated around Chin, Magway Region (မကွေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) and Sagaing Region (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး) - northern provinces and areas of resistance.

During the investigation, Myanmar Witness also analysed the language, design and imagery within these pamphlets in order to draw out more meaning, and assess the possible aims of actors involved in creating these pamphlets. This revealed the use of unfalsifiable information, the shift towards the use of graphic imagery, and the use of 'fact check' stamps, perhaps to improve the perceived legitimacy of the pamphlets.

Although Myanmar Witness is unable to provide verifiable evidence associated with the claims circulating on social media and in news media, this investigation has identified a number of trends. These trends signal that there may be an ongoing, concerted effort by pro-regime forces to sway public opinion. This is supported by the use of internet shutdowns

to prevent fact-checking, combined with the use of false or unverified information regarding opposition movements and political parties.

## List of Abbreviations

- Global New Light of Myanmar - GNLM
- Security Administration Council - SAC
- Chin National Army - CNA
- People's Defence Force - PDF
- National Unity Government - NUG
- National League for Democracy - NLD
- Fire Information and Resource Management System - FIRMS
- Ethnic Armed Organisations - EAOs
- Organisation of Islamic Cooperation - OIC
- Kachin Independence Army - KIA
- Chin National Front - CNF
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - UNODC
- Arkan Army - AA
- Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw - CRPH